



TALBOT COUNTY EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

MISSION STATEMENT

The Talbot County government is committed to providing the best possible service to the citizens who have given us their public trust. The County strives to preserve the rural and agricultural character of the area, while promoting economic development and protecting the environment and natural resources so that the special quality of life we enjoy remains intact.

INTRODUCTION

This handbook is intended to familiarize employees with Talbot County Government (hereinafter referred to as “County”) and provide a general understanding of the personnel policies of the County, including information about working conditions, employee benefits and some of the policies affecting your employment. However, each department within the County Government is unique and may have its own established rules and regulations, therefore, some departmental policies must be adhered to and may supersede County policy. Employees are encouraged to become familiar with the contents of this handbook, for it will answer many common questions concerning employment with the County. You should read, understand, and comply with all provisions of the handbook. It describes many of your responsibilities as an employee and outlines the programs developed by the County to benefit employees. It is hoped that the handbook can enhance a working environment that is conducive to both personal and professional growth for employees of the County.

No employee handbook can anticipate every circumstance or situation, nor answer every question about employment or policy. If more detailed or complete information is needed regarding any policy described in this handbook, please contact your supervisor or the Administrative Services Office (hereinafter referred to as “Administrative Services”).

THE HANDBOOK IS FOR REFERENCE PURPOSES ONLY. IT IS NOT AN EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT AND IS NOT INTENDED TO CREATE CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS OF ANY KIND.

In order to retain necessary flexibility in the administration of policies and procedures, the County reserves the right to change, revise, supplement, rescind or eliminate any policies or portion of the handbook and/or benefits described in this handbook, as the need may arise and as it deems appropriate, in its sole and absolute discretion without notification to employees. The

only exception to discretionary change is our employment “at will” policy, which permits you or the County to terminate your employment for any reason at any time, providing such termination is in accordance with applicable federal, state, or local laws or regulations. The only recognized deviations from the stated policies are those authorized and adopted by the County Council. Employees will, of course, be notified of such changes to the handbook as they occur.

This handbook supersedes any previous handbook, written or unwritten policy, and any past practices; and said handbook, policy and practices are not retroactive to the effective date of this handbook.

The handbook cannot be expected to provide answers to every question or concern that may arise. Questions regarding any County policy should be addressed to your department head or Administrative Services. Good communication is a vital factor in the success of any organization. We want you to know that we are always available to listen to your questions and will respond in an appropriate and expeditious manner.

The Talbot County Council considers its employees to be its most valuable resource and is committed to supporting their efforts in performance of job responsibilities. The Council believes that this philosophy empowers its employees to offer outstanding customer service to the citizens of Talbot County.

R. Andrew Hollis
County Manager

September 28, 1999

ABOUT TALBOT COUNTY

Talbot County, Maryland was established during America's colonial period as an agricultural and shipbuilding center on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The County has more than 600 miles of tidal shoreline and is approximately 166,000 acres in size. The population of Talbot County is approximately 35,000, increasing at about 1% per year. The County has five incorporated municipalities (Easton, St. Michaels, Oxford, Trappe, and Queen Anne), which have their own elected governments, independent from the County government.

The County government is chartered by the General Assembly of Maryland for "home rule", which means the County can enact many of its own regulations without approval from the Maryland state government. Talbot County is governed by the County Council, which consists of five at large members who are elected for 4-year non-staggered terms. It is the Council's responsibility to enact local laws and establish the policies by which the County operates.

Nearly 300 employees work for the County, which is directed by the County Manager. Most County departments and agencies are located in the Easton area, though the public properties of the County are located throughout the County, including roads, public landings, sanitary facilities, park facilities, and schools.

The County provides a wide variety of services for the public, including emergency medical and disaster assistance, roads maintenance, wastewater treatment, library services and recreational activities and programs, public safety and health services, solid waste disposal and recycling. The County also manages several public facilities including the Community Center, the Hog Neck Golf Course, the George P. Murphy Community Pool, and the Easton Airport, which are all open to the public. Additionally, the County administers many programs to assure the safe and orderly development and use of the County's land and water resources, in order to preserve the environment for future generations.

EMPLOYMENT

The County strives to maintain a workplace that promotes fairness, safety, and integrity for all employees and the citizens served by the County. The following policies and procedures are designed to help achieve this objective:

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

The working conditions, wages, and benefits the County provides to its employees are competitive with those offered by other local employers and public service organizations. The County recognizes the importance of maintaining a professional and motivational working environment in order to attract and retain skilled employees who will provide the quality of service that the public expects and deserves.

Open communication between employees and their supervisors is encouraged. If employees have concerns about work conditions or compensation, they are encouraged to voice these concerns openly and directly to their supervisors.

Experience has shown that when employees deal openly and directly with supervisors, the work environment can be excellent, communications can be clear, and attitudes can be positive. It is believed that the County amply demonstrates its commitment to employees by responding effectively to employee concerns.

EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION

A County employment application form, available at Administrative Services must be completed and submitted by any person, (including current employees), applying for an advertised position

with the County. Notices of vacant or newly authorized positions are circulated to all County departments in addition to being advertised to the general public. Priority is given to current, qualified County employees in the hiring process. It is the County's policy to promote qualified individuals from within the organization as the first priority in filling positions.

The County relies upon the accuracy of information contained in employment applications, as well as the accuracy of other data presented throughout the hiring process and employment. Any misrepresentations, falsifications, or material omissions in any of this information may result in the County's exclusion of the individual from further consideration for employment or if the person has been hired or is currently employed by the County, termination of employment. As part of the pre-employment hiring process all prospective candidates will be required to undergo a drug test before a formal offer of employment is made.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

In order to provide equal employment and advancement opportunities to all individuals, County employment decisions are based on merit, qualifications, and abilities.

The County does not discriminate in employment opportunities or practices on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, veteran status, physical or mental handicap or any basis prohibited by federal, state or local laws. It is the practice and policy of Talbot County to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local labor laws and regulations pertaining to employment. This policy governs all aspects of employment, including hiring selection, job assignment, compensation, promotion, transfers, training programs, discipline, termination of employment, and all other terms, conditions and privileges of employment.

Any employees with questions or concerns about any type of discrimination in the workplace are

encouraged to bring these issues to the attention of their immediate supervisor or the Assistant County Manager. If the supervisor or department head is unavailable, non-responsive, or is involved in the complaint, or the employee believes it would be inappropriate to contact that person, the employee should immediately contact the Assistant County Manager or, if necessary, the County Manager. Employees can raise concerns and make reports without fear of reprisal. Anyone found to be engaging in any type of unlawful discrimination will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION

The County is committed to complying fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and ensuring equal opportunity in employment for qualified persons with disabilities. All employment practices and activities are conducted on a non-discriminatory basis.

The County's hiring procedures may be modified to accommodate the special needs of persons with disabilities. Upon request, job applications are available in alternative, accessible formats, as is assistance in completing the application. Pre-employment inquiries are only made regarding an applicant's ability to perform the duties of the position for which an application is submitted.

Reasonable accommodation is available for disabled employees, where their disability could affect their function in job performance. All employment decisions are based on the merits of the situation in accordance with defined criteria; an individual's disability is not a factor in the selection process.

County employees with disabilities receive pay and other forms of compensation (or changes in compensation) equal to non-disabled employees in comparable positions, as well as equal consideration in job assignments, classifications, organizational structure, position descriptions,

lines of progression, and seniority listing. Leave of all types is available to all permanent, full-time employees on an equal basis.

EMPLOYMENT REFERENCE CHECKS

To ensure that individuals who join the County workforce are qualified and have a strong potential to be productive and successful, it is the County's policy to contact the employment references of all applicants.

Responses to inquiries on present or former County employees from potential successor employers are provided by the Assistant County Manager, or if necessary, the County Manager. Written responses will be submitted only to those reference check inquiries that are submitted in writing. Responses to such inquiries will confirm the dates of employment, wage rates, and position(s) held. No employment data will be released without a written authorization and release signed by the individual who is the subject of the inquiry.

ORIENTATION

Each employee shall receive an orientation package on the date of hire. This package contains several informational forms required for completion and submittal to Administrative Services, as well as general information, including a copy of this handbook. Employees will be asked to carefully review all items in the orientation package. Assistance in completing the forms or questions on the information provided should be directed to the employee's supervisor or the department head. Specific job training is the responsibility of the supervisor or department head, and will be coordinated with the Assistant County Manager to assure its successful completion.

PROBATIONARY PERIOD

A six (6) month probationary period is required for all new employees and is intended to give the employees the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to achieve a satisfactory level of performance and to determine whether the new position meets their expectations. The County uses this period to evaluate employee capabilities, work habits, and overall performance. Either the employee or the County may end the employment relationship “at will” at any time during the probationary period, with or without cause or advance notice.

All new and rehired employees work on a probationary basis for the first 180 calendar days (6 months) after the date of hire. Employees who are promoted or transferred to a new position within the County must complete a secondary probationary period of the same length with each reassignment to a new position. The County reserves the right to extend the employee’s probationary period for any reason for a specific period not to exceed six (6) additional months. The employee shall be notified in writing of any extensions of the probationary period.

An interim evaluation shall be conducted after approximately three (3) months of service or approximately three (3) months after a promotion, demotion or classification change.

A formal performance evaluation shall be conducted within two (2) weeks prior to the end of an employee’s six (6) month probationary period in any new position. If the evaluation is satisfactory or better, regular full-time employment status in the position will commence. This period allows the supervisor and employee time to discuss the job responsibilities, standards, and performance requirements of the new position.

In cases of promotion or transfer within the County, an employee who is not successful in the new position can be removed from that position at any time during the probationary period, upon

recommendation of the department head and approval of the County Manager. If this occurs, the employee may be allowed to return to his or her former job, or to a comparable job, for which the employee is qualified, contingent on the availability of an appropriate position.

Upon satisfactory completion of the initial probationary period, and upon recommendation of the department head and approval of the County Manager, employees receive the "regular full-time" employment classification.

EMPLOYEE MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS

To help ensure that employees are able to perform their duties safely, medical examinations may be required for certain job classifications.

After an offer has been made to an applicant entering a designated job category, a health professional of the County's choice will perform a medical examination at the County's expense. The offer of employment and assignment to duties is contingent upon satisfactory completion of the exam.

Information on an employee's medical condition or history will be kept separate from other employee information and maintained confidentially. Access to this information will be limited to the County Manager, the Assistant County Manager, department heads as determined by the County Manager, and other County representatives who demonstrate a legitimate need.

IMMIGRATION LAW COMPLIANCE

The County is committed to employing only United States citizens and non-citizens who are authorized to work in the United States, without discrimination on the basis of citizenship or national origin.

As a condition of employment each new employee must complete the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9 and present documentation establishing identity and employment eligibility. Former employees who are rehired must also complete the form if they have not completed an (I-9) with the County within the past three years, or if their previous (I-9) is no longer retained or valid.

Employees with questions or seeking more information on immigration law issues are encouraged to contact Administrative Services. Employees may raise questions or complaints about immigration law compliance without fear of reprisal.

NON-DISCLOSURE

The protection of confidential information may be necessary in certain departments or during certain projects of the County. Such confidential information may pertain to projects and proposals, for which contracts have not yet been awarded. All employees may be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement as a condition of employment. Employees who improperly use or disclose confidential information will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. In addition, the County may initiate legal action against any employee who discloses confidential information, even if the employee did not actually benefit from the disclosed information.

ETHICS AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Employees have an obligation to perform their duties and provide the services of their employment in an ethical manner and within guidelines that prohibit actual or potential conflicts of interest. The County's Ethics Ordinance provides general criteria on issues related to the

subject of acceptable standards of conduct in job performance. Employees are expected to review the County's Ethics Ordinance in its entirety and must comply with all its requirements. Employees should contact Administrative Services for specific information concerning the County's ethics standards and conflict of interest criteria. The County's Ethics Ordinance applies to all County employees, including: County elected officials, the County Manager, all County department heads and heads of County agencies, the Talbot County Liquor Board, the Talbot County Electrical Board, the Talbot County Planning Commission, and the Talbot County Board of Appeals.

An actual or potential conflict of interest occurs when an employee is in a position to influence a decision that may result in a personal gain for that employee or for a relative as a result of the County's business or service. For the purposes of this policy, a relative is any person who is related by blood or marriage, or whose relationship with the employee is similar to that of persons who are related by blood or marriage.

No "presumption of guilt" is created by the mere existence of a relationship with clients of the County. However, if employees have any influence on transactions involving purchases, contracts, or approvals, it is imperative that they disclose to Administrative Services the existence of any actual or potential conflict of interest so that safeguards can be established to protect all parties. Documentation of disclosure is required annually by employees in certain classifications.

Personal gain may result not only in cases where an employee or relative has a significant ownership in a firm with which the County does business, but also when an employee or relative receives any kickback, bribe, substantial gift, or special consideration as a result of any transaction or business dealings involving the County.

OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT

Employees may hold outside jobs as long as they meet the performance standards of their position with the County and the outside position does not affect in any manner the employee's work schedule with the County. All employees will be judged by the same performance standards and will be subject to the County's scheduling demands, regardless of any existing outside work requirements.

If the County determines that an employee's outside work interferes with performance or the ability to meet the requirements of the County as they are modified from time to time, the employee may be asked to terminate the outside employment if he or she wishes to remain employed by the County.

Outside employment that constitutes a conflict of interest is prohibited. Employees may not receive any income or material gain from individuals outside the County for materials produced or services rendered while performing their County jobs.

Employees working part time for more than four (4) hours in one department cannot report or be scheduled to work for another department without having a minimum of eight (8) hours off between assignments. Full time employees cannot work part time for any other department within the County.

HIRING OF RELATIVES

The employment of relatives in the same area of an organization may cause serious conflicts and problems with favoritism and employee morale. In addition to claims of partiality in treatment at work, personal conflicts from outside the work environment can be carried into day-to-day working relationships.

Relatives of persons currently employed by the County may be hired only if they will not be working directly for or supervising a relative, and County employees cannot be transferred into such a reporting relationship.

If the relative relationship is established after employment, the individuals concerned will decide who is to be transferred, or terminated from employment if no openings exist. If the decision is not made by the employees within thirty (30) calendar days, the County Manager, in consultation with the appropriate department head, will make the determination.

If a family relationship exists with the effective date of this handbook, those employees will be grandfathered until such a time that one or the other is reassigned or terminates employment.

In other cases where a conflict or the potential for conflict arises, even if there is no supervisory relationship involved, the parties may be separated by reassignment or terminated from employment.

BENEFITS

All full-time employees of the County are entitled to the benefits outlined below. This summary provides the general guidelines of the County's benefit package. Specific questions regarding employee benefits should be directed to Administrative Services.

VACATION/ANNUAL LEAVE

Vacation leave, as paid annual leave, is an available benefit for all full-time employees, who are eligible to earn and/or use vacation time, or annual leave, as described in this policy.

The amount of paid vacation time, or annual leave, employees receive each year increases with the length of their time in service as full-time employees. Time in service is calculated from the date of hire, or rehire, as a full-time employee. Previous time in service, prior to rehire, does not contribute to current service time relative to the accrued rate of vacation/annual leave. Previous time in service can be considered for vacation/annual and seniority purposes, as determined by the County Manager. However, previous service for retirement purposes will be determined in accordance with the State Retirement/Pension Plan guidelines.

Paid vacation/annual time is earned according to the following schedule:

VACATION/ANNUAL LEAVE EARNING SCHEDULE

<u>Time In Service</u>	<u>Earned Vacation Days</u>	
	<u>MONTHLY</u>	<u>EACH YEAR</u>
At the end of 6 months		6 1/2 days*
7 months to 1 year	1.08 days	6 1/2 days**
1 through 5 years	1.08 days	13 days

Over 5 years through 15 years	1.50 days	18 days
Over 15 years	1.91 days	23days***

* AFTER SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF PROBATION

** 1.12 DAYS EARNED ON ANNIVERSARY MONTH

***1.99 DAYS EARNED ON ANNIVERSARY MONTH

Earned vacation/annual leave for every full month of service is credited in advance on the first day of every month. However, before vacation/annual leave can be used, an employee must successfully complete the initial probationary period of (6) six months. After that time, employees can request use of earned vacation/annual leave, including that accrued during the initial probationary period. Should an employee fail to receive a satisfactory or better performance evaluation during the initial introductory period, or extension thereof, and is released from employment before achieving full-time, regular employment status, no accrued vacation/annual leave is available and the employee will not be paid for any vacation leave.

Vacation/annual leave can be used in minimum increments of one quarter (1/4) hour. To take vacation/annual leave, employees shall submit a leave request to their supervisor and receive approval of the request before taking the leave. Requests for three (3) days vacation/annual leave, or less, should be submitted at least three (3) calendar days in advance. Requests for more than three (3) days vacation/annual leave should be submitted at least seven (7) calendar days in advance. Employees are encouraged to give as much advance notice as possible regarding desired leave time. Unscheduled vacation/annual time will be handled on a case by case basis and must be approved by the immediate supervisor. Vacation/annual leave requests will be considered, but not necessarily approved, based on scheduled operational needs and staffing requirements as determined by the employee's supervisor or department head.

Vacation/annual leave may accumulate to a maximum of thirty (30) days. Any total accrued

vacation/annual leave over thirty (30) days at the end of any calendar quarter will be forfeited by the employee. Vacation/annual leave will not accrue if an employee is not working due to extended sick leave/disability, any type of suspension, or any type of leave without pay. Employees shall be responsible to be aware of their leave balance, and should consult their supervisor or Administrative Services, to validate leave records.

Upon termination of employment, employees will be paid for unused vacation/annual leave that has been earned through the last day of work. However, the County requires at least ten (10) working days written resignation notice from a resigning employee and may deduct one day of available vacation/annual leave for each day less than the required notice given. The County Manager, considering extenuating circumstances shall consider exceptions to these criteria for the earning, use, and payment of vacation/annual leave.

HOLIDAYS

Subject to annual approval by the County Council, County employees follow a Holiday Leave Schedule published at the beginning of each calendar year. Advance Life Support, Airport, Sheriff's Department, Detention Center, Emergency Management and County Recreational Facilities employees shall receive an equivalent amount of holiday leave but will observe holidays in accordance with work schedules established by their respective departments. The Holiday Leave Schedule cannot be modified without prior approval of the appropriate supervisor. Holidays cannot be carried over from year to year without prior written approval from the County Manager.

Holiday pay will be the same as the employee's base pay rate as of the date of the holiday. Overtime or compensatory time earned on a holiday shall be at the same rate as earned on a non-holiday. Paid time off for holidays will be counted as hours worked for the purposes of

determining whether overtime pay is owed.

If a scheduled holiday falls during an employee's approved absence (i.e., vacation/annual leave, sick leave), the employee will not be charged leave on the holiday.

SICK LEAVE

The County provides paid sick leave benefits to all full-time, permanent employees for periods of temporary absence due to illnesses or injuries. Eligible employees will accrue sick leave benefits at the rate of ten days per year/.83 of a day (.87 on Anniversary month) for every full month of service, which is credited on the first day of every month. Sick leave benefits accrue indefinitely from the date of hire.

Sick leave benefits are intended solely to provide income protection in the event of illness or injury, and may not be used for any other absence. Sick leave is a valuable employee benefit which should be conserved and used only as necessary. Sick leave will not accrue if any employee is not working due to extended illness/disabilities, any type of suspension or any type of leave without pay.

Sick leave will be granted in quarter (1/4) hour increments. If an employee's sick leave balance falls below zero at the end of any calendar month, the negative balance will be deducted from the employee's annual leave balance. If the employee has no accrued annual leave, the sick leave will be without pay unless leave is advanced. However, unapproved incidents of sick leave without pay are not permitted and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Sick leave can be used by an employee for his or her own illness or disability, for a death, disability or illness in an employee's immediate family, for the birth of a child, or for the

adoption of a child by an employee. Sick leave can also be used for medical appointments for the employee and members of the immediate family (spouse, child, parent only). In medical emergencies and with the prior written approval from the County Manager, an employee may use sick leave to care for a seriously ill spouse, child or parent. The employee may be required to provide certification for immediate family members' appointments.

A doctor's certificate may be required at any time the department head suspects abuse of sick leave (i.e., days called in sick before or after weekends or holidays, excessive appointments or any identifiable pattern of absenteeism.)

The County has established the following guidelines in order to prevent the abuse of sick leave and to apply the program in a consistent and equitable manner:

1. Illness of more than three (3) consecutive working days requires a certificate from a licensed medical provider which authenticates the period of illness, states that the employee was unable to work, and verifies the ability of the employee to safely return to work and perform all functions of the job.
2. If an employee has eleven (11) individual sick leave days or occurrences during a calendar year, the employee will be counseled by his or her immediate supervisor as to the consequences of sick leave abuse.
3. If an employee has twelve (12) individual sick leave days or occurrences during a revolving twelve (12) month period, the employee may be subject to discipline as outlined in the County's progressive disciplinary procedures.
4. If an employee has thirteen (13) or more individual sick leave days or occurrences during a revolving twelve (12) month period, the employee may be subject to further discipline

as outlined in the County's progressive disciplinary procedures.

While the County recognizes that the above guidelines are necessary to prevent the abuse of sick leave the handling of legitimate extended instances of illness will be reviewed by the County Manager on a case by case basis.

CONVERSION OF SICK LEAVE

County employees who are eligible to earn sick leave and are members of the Maryland State Retirement System may, at retirement, convert unused sick leave into membership service credit at a rate of twenty-two (22) days of unused sick leave, which equates to one month of membership service credit. All unused sick leave is forfeited when an employee resigns or is terminated.

EXTENDED SICK LEAVE (WITH PAY)

The County will consider requests for advanced sick leave with pay, on a case by case basis. If approved, the employee must sign an Agreement of Leave Advance stating the number of days the employee will be granted for advanced leave. No more than twenty (20) days of advanced sick leave will be granted. Should the employee leave employment prior to repayment of advance sick leave, any wages due the employee upon termination of employment will be applied towards the dollar value of the sick leave balance. If a balance continues to be owed to the County, the employee will remit the balance immediately upon termination. All unused sick leave and annual leave must be exhausted before consideration will be given to a request for advanced sick leave with pay. The employee shall be obligated to repay the advanced sick leave as earned once the employee returns to work.

Employees will be able to donate sick leave (no compensation allowed) to co-workers who have

a serious and prolonged medical condition. However, sick leave can be donated only if the donating employee will have a sick leave balance of thirty (30) days after the donation. An employee may not receive more than 260 days of donated leave over the employee's entire County service. All donated sick leave shall be approved by the County Manager.

Service time will continue to accumulate during the paid advanced sick leave period, but vacation/annual and sick leave will not accrue.

EXTENDED SICK LEAVE (WITHOUT PAY)

The provisions for continued or extended sick leave without pay are outlined in the Family and Medical Leave Act Section. Employee requests for unpaid extended sick leave which do not qualify under the FMLA guidelines, will be considered on a case by case basis. If the employee's extended absence creates a hardship for the department, the request will be denied. All requests for extended sick leave must be approved by the County Manager.

THE FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT (FMLA)

The Family and Medical Leave Act requires the employer to provide up to twelve (12) weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to "eligible" employees for certain family and medical reasons. Employees are eligible if they have worked for the County for at least twelve (12) months and have provided at least 1,250 hours of work during the twelve (12) month period proceeding the start of the leave.

An eligible employee is entitled to FMLA leave for (1) the birth of a child; (2) the placement of a child for adoption or foster care; (3) the care of an employee's seriously ill spouse, child, or parent; or (4) the employee's own serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform his or her job functions.

EARNED OR ACCRUED PAID LEAVE WILL BE CONSIDERED IN CALCULATING FMLA

LEAVE AS FOLLOWS: Sick leave and vacation/annual leave can be utilized for FMLA leave involving care for an employee's own medical condition, care for a family member or leave involving the birth or placement of a child. Once all paid leave is exhausted, FMLA leave will be unpaid.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS DURING FMLA LEAVE

The health benefits provided the employee prior to the FMLA leave will be maintained during the FMLA leave. The employee may choose not to retain health coverage during FMLA leave, but is entitled to be reinstated upon return to work.

1. Payment of Health Care Premiums: Any share of the health insurance premium which was paid by the employee prior to FMLA leave, must continue to be paid by the employee during such leave. If the FMLA leave is paid leave, the employee's share of the health insurance premium will be deducted from the employee's pay. If the FMLA leave is unpaid, the employee's premium must be remitted to the Talbot County Finance Office on or before the first day of each month. If an employee fails to pay their share of the premium within thirty (30) days of the due date, the County's obligation to maintain health insurance coverage ceases. The County may recover from an employee the employee's share of health care premiums if the employee fails to make payments. If an employee fails to return to work upon expiration of FMLA leave, the County will recover the full cost of health care coverage paid for the employee during the period of unpaid FMLA leave.

2. Employees will cease to accrue vacation/annual and sick leave during unpaid FMLA leave. Holidays will not be paid during unpaid FMLA leave. However, service time will continue to accumulate during unpaid FMLA leave.

3. The employee's group life insurance benefits will continue, however, retirement benefits and workers compensation insurance will cease during unpaid FMLA leave.

EMPLOYEES RIGHTS ON RETURNING TO WORK

Upon return to work from FMLA leave, an employee is entitled to be returned to an equivalent position in terms of pay and benefits as the employee held when the leave commenced. An employee has no right to return to his or her same position.

LEAVE NOTICE

An employee must give at least thirty (30) days advance notice before taking FMLA leave, if the leave is foreseeable. If thirty (30) days notice is not practical, because of a medical emergency, the notice must be submitted as soon as practical.

MEDICAL CERTIFICATION

If an employee requests leave to care for a seriously ill spouse, son, daughter, or parent, or due to the employee's own serious health condition, the employee must provide certification issued by a licensed health care provider supporting the need for FMLA leave. The employee has fifteen (15) days to provide this documentation. Recertification will be necessary if the employee requests an extension of leave or if circumstances described in the original certification have changed significantly, or if the County receives information that casts doubt on the validity of the certification. The County may also request an employee on FMLA leave to report periodically on the employee's status and intent to return to work. If an employee gives notice of his or her intent not to return to work, the County's obligation to maintain health benefits ceases. An employee may be eligible to continue his or her health insurance coverage at the employee's expense if the employee qualifies under the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA), which is discussed on page 29.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Contact Administrative Services for specific detailed information or with questions regarding the FMLA.

BEREAVEMENT LEAVE

In the event of the death of an employee's spouse or child, the County will provide leave with pay for a period not to exceed ten (10) regularly scheduled workdays. In the event of the death of an employee's father or mother, the County will provide leave with pay for a period not to exceed five (5) regularly scheduled work days. In the event of the death of an employee's brother, sister, mother-in-law, father-in-law, and grandparents, the County will provide leave with pay for a period not to exceed three (3) regularly scheduled work days.

Should the death of a blood relative not in the above category occur, an employee may be given one (1) day off with pay to attend the funeral, as approved by the supervisor.

If an employee requires more bereavement leave than is specified, the employee may request vacation/annual leave or sick leave. Supervisors may request proof of death for approval of bereavement leave.

JURY DUTY

The County encourages employees to fulfill their civic responsibilities by serving jury duty or appearing in Court for witness duty when required to do so.

While serving on jury duty or appearing in Court as a subpoenaed witness, employees will continue to receive full base salary and benefits, without charge against any leave balances, provided they are not paid for the court ordered services. Any compensation paid by the Court

for jury or witness service, not including reimbursement for travel, subsistence, or lodging costs, must be remitted to the County within thirty (30) days of completion of the service. Should such payment for jury or witness service not be remitted, the County may charge the absence against the employee's vacation/annual leave. The County will continue to provide health insurance benefits for the full term of the jury or witness duty absence. Vacation/annual leave, sick leave, and holiday benefits will continue to accrue and be paid during authorized service absences.

Employees must show the jury duty summons or subpoena to their supervisor as soon as possible so that work schedule arrangements to accommodate their absence can be suitably coordinated. Employees assigned to jury or witness duty are expected to report for work whenever the Court schedule permits.

Where the public interest or safety requires that an employee not be absent from employment duties, the Department Head may request the Court to excuse the employee from assigned jury service.

COURT SUBPOENAS

If subpoenaed, immediate notice must be given to the appropriate supervisor. A full-time employee who is summoned by subpoena to appear in court shall be permitted to be absent from work, as required by such subpoena, without loss of pay and without charge to sick leave or vacation/annual leave. If appearance is due to charge against employee, then the employee will not be paid but may choose to use vacation/annual leave.

If an employee is paid for these services as a witness, then such absence must be charged against vacation/annual leave. If the employee does not have sufficient leave to cover such absence, a leave of absence without pay will be granted. The County, in turn, expects employees to report

to work on days when they are not called or are excused early.

MILITARY LEAVE

An employee who is a member of the U.S. Armed Forces (Regular or Reserves) shall be entitled to leave for military training for a period not to exceed fifteen (15) days annually without loss of pay or charge against any vacation/annual leave. However, paid military leave is not a legal requirement and may be rescinded at any time. An employee must be on permanent full-time status to qualify for paid military leave. If an employee is called for extended active duty, the employee's pay will cease after fifteen (15) working days. Health, life insurance and retirement benefits will continue to be provided to the employee, however, the employee must pay for any share of the health insurance premium which was paid by the employee prior to military leave. The employee's premium must be remitted to the Talbot County Finance Office on or before the first day of each month. If an employee fails to pay their share of the premium within thirty (30) days of the due date, the County's obligation to maintain health insurance coverage ceases.

PERSONAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE (NON-MEDICAL OR FMLA RELATED)

Request for extended personal leave (leave that does not qualify for FMLA leave), must be submitted in writing to Administrative Services and will be submitted to the County Manager. The employee must be a full-time employee and must exhaust all vacation/annual leave before the employee will be given consideration for the taking of personal leave of absence.

Personal Leave of Absence requests (LOA) shall be submitted to Administrative Services, at least thirty (30) days in advance, or as soon as possible before the date of the leave. A personal LOA may be granted for a period of up to sixty (60) calendar days. Consideration will be given to a written request for a single extension of not more than thirty (30) calendar days. With

approval, an employee may take any accrued vacation/annual leave as part of the approved period of personal LOA, but may not take sick leave during a period of personal LOA. A personal LOA will not be available as an extension of other unpaid LOA approvals, such as family leave or medical leave.

Requests for personal LOA will be evaluated based on a number of factors, including anticipated work load requirements and staffing considerations during the proposed period of absence.

Subject to the terms, conditions, and limitations of the applicable plans, the County will continue to provide health insurance benefits for the full period of the approved personal LOA provided the employee pays the employee's share of the health insurance premium.

Service time will continue to accumulate during an approved personal LOA period. Benefit accruals of vacation/annual and sick leave will be suspended during the LOA and will resume upon return to active employment.

When a personal LOA ends, every reasonable effort will be made to return the employee to the same position, if it is available, or to a similar available position for which the employee is qualified. However, the County cannot guarantee reinstatement in all cases.

If an employee fails to report to work promptly at the expiration of the approved personal LOA period, the County will assume the employee has resigned.

EMERGENCY CLOSINGS (LIBERAL LEAVE)

At times, emergencies such as severe weather, fires, power or utility failures, or other adverse conditions can disrupt County operations. County offices and departments shall remain open for the full scheduled work day unless authorization for closing, or early closing, or other deviation

is received from the County Manager. All departments and offices will be given notice of any authorized closing or early closings via appropriate public media and other means available. Employees who leave work before an official early closing time, as well as those employees who report for work late or do not report for work at all, will be required to use earned vacation/annual leave or leave without pay for days or hours taken. If only one facility or work station is affected by an emergency condition, or if a limited closing is announced, only those employees assigned to that facility or work station will be affected, while all other employees shall be expected to report to work as usual. If a liberal leave policy is announced without closure of facilities, employees not reporting to work will be allowed to use vacation/annual leave for the absence, though all employees are urged to make every reasonable effort to report for duty. If the employee does not have any accrued vacation/annual leave or does not wish to use vacation/annual leave, the employee must take the time off without pay.

Employees in essential operations or providing emergency services must report to work on a day when operations are officially closed. In these circumstances, employees who work will receive regular pay for service during their regular shift, and overtime pay, as applicable, for additional service.

HEALTH AND DENTAL INSURANCE

Effective the first day of the month following the date of hire, full-time employees, including incumbent elected officials, are entitled to health and dental insurance coverage. Available plans currently include individual, parent/child, husband/wife or family coverage for Blue Cross/Blue Shield Traditional or the Delmarva Health Maintenance Organization.

The highest cost for each coverage plan is used as the base to calculate the County's contributions to insurance premiums. The County pays 90% of the cost of an individual plan and 85% of the

cost for husband/wife, parent/child, or full family coverage.

If the employee does not need medical coverage because he or she has health insurance coverage elsewhere, then he/she may waive coverage under the County plan and receive \$600 per year payable in equal installments with your regular, bi-weekly paycheck. The employee will be required to provide proof of other coverage before the "opt-out payment" will be approved by Administrative Services. This option is not available to elected officials.

Details of each health and dental insurance plan, including specific coverage schedules and the employee's cost, are provided with the new hire information packet, or available at Administrative Services.

HEALTH INSURANCE BENEFITS CONTINUATION (COBRA)

The federal Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) gives employees and their qualified dependents the opportunity to continue health insurance coverage under the County's health plan when a "qualifying event" would normally result in the loss of eligibility. Some common qualifying events are resignation, termination of employment, death of an employee, a reduction in an employee's hours or a leave of absence, an employee's divorce or legal separation, and a dependent child no longer meeting eligibility requirements.

Under COBRA, the employee or dependent pays the full cost of coverage at the County's group rates plus an administrative fee of two (2) percent. The County provides each eligible employee or beneficiary with a written notice describing rights and obligations under COBRA, including eligible coverage under the County's health insurance plan. Length of participation under COBRA will be in accordance with Federal Guidelines.

WORKER'S COMPENSATION INSURANCE

The County provides a comprehensive worker's compensation insurance program at no cost to employees. This program covers any injury or illness sustained in the course of employment that requires medical, surgical, or hospital treatment. Subject to applicable legal requirements, and with the approval of the County Worker's Compensation Insurance Carrier, worker's compensation insurance provides benefits after a short waiting period or immediately, if the employee is hospitalized.

Employees who sustain work-related injuries or illnesses should inform their supervisor immediately. No matter how minor an on-the-job injury may appear, it is considered important and the employee is to see that it be reported immediately.

Neither the County nor the County's insurance carrier will be liable for the payment of worker's compensation benefits for injuries that occur during an employee's voluntary participation in any off-duty recreational, social, or athletic activity sponsored by the County.

BLOOD BANK

Membership in the Group Blood Bank is an optional benefit available to permanent, full-time employees. Membership costs are \$5.00 per year and are billed by the Finance Office on an annual basis.

CREDIT UNION

The services of the State Employees Credit Union of Maryland are available to County employees. Programs available through the Credit Union include but are not limited to secured loans, IRA's, checking accounts, and savings plans.

LIFE INSURANCE

Life insurance coverage is available to all active, regular full-time employees. Each eligible employee receives life insurance benefit coverage, for which premiums are paid by the County, on the first day of the month following the date of hire. The amount of the coverage is equal to the employee's annual salary, with said coverage being doubled for accidental death.

RETIREMENT BENEFITS

The County participates in the Maryland State Employees Retirement System. Employees are vested in the Pension or Retirement Plan after five (5) years of service. As part of this program, if an employee dies after one year of service, the employee's beneficiary(s) receives monetary compensation equal to one (1) year of the employee's salary. Retirees are also eligible for term life insurance, which is paid by the County and is equal to one (1) time the annual salary in effect at the time of retirement (maximum of \$200,000). Retirees are not eligible for Accidental Death and Dismemberment Insurance. Employees are urged to contact Administrative Services or the Maryland State Retirement Agency or refer to the available manuals for more detailed information regarding retirement benefits under the State Retirement and Pension System program. The objectives of this program are to guarantee you income when you retire and to help provide for the welfare of your dependents.

A retiree who meets the Maryland State Retirement System qualifications for full retirement benefits may remain on the County's health insurance enrollment if the employee has completed at least five (5) years of employment with the County at the time of retirement. If an employee has sixteen (16) or more years of time in service with the County, the County will pay 66.66% of the health insurance cost. If an employee has less than sixteen (16) years of time in service, the County subsidy of health insurance premiums is reduced one sixteenth ($1/16^{\text{th}}$) for each year

under sixteen (16) years of time in service. An employee's spouse will be eligible for continued health insurance benefits after the employee's death in accordance with the Maryland State Retirement & Pension System Plans.

PUBLIC EMPLOYEE 457 DEFERRED COMPENSATION PLAN

The County offers a 457 Deferred Compensation Plan, which permits the employee, on a voluntary basis, to authorize a portion of the employee's salary to be withheld and invested for payment to the employee at a later date. Neither the contributed amount nor any investment earnings are subject to current federal and state income taxes. Taxes become payable when the deferred income plus earnings are distributed to the employee, generally at retirement when the employee may be in a lower income tax bracket and subject to payment of less taxes. Under Section 457 of the Internal Revenue Code, Deferred Compensation Plans were established to enable public employees to save towards retirement with pre-tax dollars. Detailed information is available in Administrative Services.

SALARY PLAN

The compensation of County employees is administered through a Salary Plan, which is designed to attract and retain skilled employees who will provide the quality of service that the public expects and deserves. The County seeks to equitably compensate all County employees. An effort is made on an on-going basis to insure that County government salaries compare favorably for comparable work with those of other public and private sector employees in the region. The salaries for different job classifications in the County Salary Plan reflect differences in qualifications, duties, and responsibilities, and are based on the principle of equal pay for comparable work. All full-time employees are paid in equal bi-weekly installments based on an annual salary, to provide a constant, stable income.

The County Salary Plan covers both full-time and part-time employees. The following is a description of the County's pay program.

I. Full-time Employees

Full-time employees are defined as employees who are employed normally for eighty (80) hours per pay period and fifty-two (52) weeks a year. All full-time employees are paid on a salary basis. Employees in non-exempt positions, as determined by the Fair Labor Standards Act, are compensated for hours worked in excess of their normal forty (40) hour work week by overtime pay. Sick leave is not considered in calculating overtime pay. Overtime pay is earned at a rate of one and one half (1 ½) hours for each overtime hour worked. All overtime must be authorized or pre-approved by the immediate supervisor. Employees in exempt positions (excluding department heads) may receive compensation for hours worked in excess of their normal forty (40) hour work week. Compensatory time, with the approval of the department head, will be granted based on one (1) hour worked equals one (1) hour compensatory time. Department

heads may be eligible for compensatory time at the discretion and approval of the County Manager.

A grade and step salary schedule for full-time employees has been established and adopted by the Talbot County Council. When hired, each full-time employee is slotted in the appropriate grade and step, based on the recommendation of the Department Head and approval of the County Manager. Employees are eligible to receive a step increase in accordance with the following schedule:

1. Employees hired between July 1st and December 31st receive a step increment the following July 1st.
2. Employees hired between January 1st and June 30th receive a step increment the following January 1st.

Full-time employees who receive an annual performance evaluation of satisfactory or better, are eligible to receive a step increase, according to the above schedule, in each year in which funding is approved by the County Council in the Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance. Once an employee reaches the highest step in the grade, the cost of living adjustment is the only increase available.

Cost of living adjustments, if approved by the County Council, are granted to all full-time employees on July 1st of each year.

If an employee is promoted to a position in a higher grade, the employee will be placed in the lowest step of the higher grade which provides for an increase of at least 6% over the employee's pre-promotion salary, unless directed otherwise by the County Council during the budget process.

If a position is changed from one classification to another classification in a higher salary grade, the employee's compensation upon such reclassification will be in accordance with the rule governing promotions or as authorized by the County Council during the budget process.

If a position is changed from one classification to another classification in a lower salary grade, the employee's grade will be lowered to that of the new classification. The employee will remain in the same step that they were assigned before the reclassification.

If an employee is demoted, the employee will be assigned a step in the lower salary grade based on the recommendation of the department head and approval of the County Manager.

When an employee's classification and grade are changed for any of the reasons mentioned above, future step increments will be granted in accordance with the above schedule (July 1 or January 1), substituting the reclassification date for the hire date. However, the January and July step increments may not change due to any restructuring or reclassification of salary grades the County Council authorizes during the budget process.

II. Part-time Employees

Part-time employees are defined as employees who are employed for less than forty (40) hours a week and/or less than fifty-two (52) weeks per year. They are paid on an hourly basis and are not eligible for County benefits, however some part-time employees may be eligible to participate in the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System Plans.

A list of part-time positions and salary ranges has been established and approved by the Talbot County Council. Department heads may submit part-time salary recommendations to the County Council during the departmental budget presentations. Pay increases for part-time employees will be granted only once in a twelve (12) month period, if approved by the County Manager.

III. Salary Plan Exceptions

If a Department Head determines that unusual circumstances warrant consideration of an exception to a provision of this Salary Plan, a written request may be submitted to the County Manager. No exceptions to this Plan will be granted without prior written approval from the County Manager.

IV. Salary Plan Review

The County's salary scale and classification schedule are reviewed periodically for comparison to current local employment market conditions. Job responsibilities are also periodically surveyed to insure that the County is paying comparable wages for comparable work. If the County Council determines that modifications to the salary structure are warranted or that positions should be reclassified, and if funding is approved by the County Council, adjustments will take effect July 1st of each year.

PAYDAYS

All full-time employees are normally paid by direct deposit in equal, biweekly installments based on annual salary. Pay stubs will include earnings for all work performed through the end of the previous payroll period, which is through the Friday prior to the Friday payday. In the event that a regularly scheduled payday falls on a holiday, employees will be paid on the last day of work before the regularly scheduled payday.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAY CORRECTIONS

The County takes all reasonable steps to ensure that employees receive the correct amount of pay

in each paycheck and that employees are paid promptly on the scheduled payday. In the unlikely event that there is an error in the pay calculation, the employee should promptly bring the discrepancy to the attention of the supervisor so that corrections can be made as quickly as possible.

AMENDMENT AND TERMINATION

The County Council reserves the right, within their discretion, to terminate policy guidelines or to modify, amend, or change the provisions, terms and conditions of the Salary Plan guidelines at any time without prior notification to employees.

RECORDS

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Performance evaluation is the process of observing and reviewing work performance, recognizing outstanding and superior performance, identifying needs for improvement, and working with employees to improve their effectiveness and efficiency to maximize the use of their knowledge, skills and abilities. Formal performance evaluations are conducted to provide both supervisors and employees the opportunity to discuss job tasks, identify and correct weaknesses, encourage and recognize strengths, and discuss positive, purposeful approaches for meeting goals. Performance evaluation is a continuous process. There should be an ongoing exchange of expectations between the employee and supervisor about work requirements and what is needed to assure that standards are met. Supervisors and employees are strongly encouraged to discuss job performance and goals on an informal, day-to-day basis.

The County has established and maintains a Performance Evaluation Program for all classifications of employees. This program is intended to:

- Provide a record of employee development and work performance.
- Promote a common understanding of individual needs, work objectives and standards of acceptable performance.
- Provide employees with feedback as to how well the supervisor feels the employee is meeting expectations.
- Suggest the specific courses of action the employee can take in order to meet or exceed expectations.
- Provide supervisors with feedback as to how they can help employees in their personal growth and development.
- Set objectives for future performance.

An interim evaluation shall be conducted after three (3) months of service or three (3) months after a promotion, demotion or classification change.

A formal performance evaluation shall be conducted within two (2) weeks prior to the end of an employee's six (6) month probationary period in any new position. If the evaluation is satisfactory or better, regular full-time employment status in the position will commence. This period allows the supervisor and employee time to discuss the job responsibilities, standards, and performance requirements of the new position.

The performance of all employees is generally evaluated on an annual basis in the Spring of each year. Interim evaluations may be conducted at the discretion of the supervisor to document special performance problems or achievements.

The department head, considering the recommendations of the immediate supervisor, shall prepare performance evaluations. Written justification is required with any performance evaluation that records an overall performance rating above or below satisfactory. Performance evaluations shall be reviewed with the employee by the department head. Employees will be asked to sign evaluations as an acknowledgement that the evaluation has been reviewed with them and that they received a copy for their own record. Such acknowledgement does not constitute acceptance of, or agreement with, the evaluation. Completed evaluation forms will be forwarded to the County Manager and will become a part of the employee's permanent personnel file, maintained in Administrative Services.

If an employee receives an overall evaluation of satisfactory or better, she or he will be eligible for a step increment increase according to the provisions of the salary plan in effect.

Promotions and merit based pay adjustments are awarded by the County in an effort to select the

most qualified people for available employment openings or employment reclassifications and to recognize superior employee performance. Prior to the annual budget process a written justification from the department head must accompany an employee's performance evaluation if a request is submitted for the employee's position to be upgraded due to additional duties, or the employee is to receive a two (2) step increase or better due to superior overall performance.

Employees who receive an overall evaluation of "needs improvement" or "unsatisfactory" are not eligible for a step increase, promotion, upgraded reclassification, or merit pay adjustment for the upcoming fiscal year. If the performance evaluation is unsatisfactory, the department head shall submit written documentation of the performance deficiencies and proposed corrective action. In both cases, the employee will be placed on temporary probationary status for a period of ninety (90) days to resolve the performance deficiency, after which another performance evaluation shall be performed. If the employee's performance has improved to a satisfactory or better overall rating through the ninety (90) day probationary period, the employee will be considered for a step increment. If the employee's performance is still deemed unsatisfactory, the employee will be dismissed from County employment.

PERSONNEL DATA CHANGES

It is the responsibility of each employee to promptly notify the County of any changes in personnel data. Personal mailing addresses, telephone numbers, names and number of dependents, individuals to be contacted in the event of an emergency, beneficiaries, educational accomplishments, and other such status information should be accurate and current at all times. Additionally, any actions relating to, or affecting, employment classification or status will be documented in each employee's personnel file. All changes in personnel data shall be coordinated through Administrative Services.

ACCESS TO PERSONNEL FILES

The County maintains a personnel file on each employee. The personnel file includes the employee's job application, resume, records of training, documentation of performance appraisals and salary increases, and other employment records.

Personnel files are the property of the County, and access to the information they contain is restricted.

Generally, only supervisors and management personnel of the County who have a legitimate reason to review information in a file are allowed to do so.

Employees who wish to review their own file should contact Administrative Services. With reasonable advance notice, employees may review their own personnel files in the County's offices and in the presence of an individual appointed by the County to maintain the files.

ATTENDANCE RECORDS

All department heads and supervisors have a responsibility to ensure that the attendance records of County employees are administered on an equitable basis consistent with the County leave policies. All absences will be recorded by type, and monthly calendars will be prepared and submitted to the appropriate supervisor. A copy of each employee's leave calendar must be forwarded to Administrative Services on a quarterly basis.

RULES AND CONDITIONS

SAFETY

In the interest of providing a safe and healthy work environment for employees, clients, and visitors, the County has established a workplace safety program. This program is a top priority for the County. The Talbot County Safety Committee, directed by the Safety Officer, has responsibility for implementing, administering, monitoring, and evaluating the County safety program, and to insure that all County workplaces are in compliance with applicable state and federal safety regulations. The success of the program depends on the alertness and personal commitment to safety by each department head, supervisor, and all employees.

The Safety Officer provides information to employees about workplace safety and health issues through regular internal communication channels such as department advisories, bulletin board postings, memorandums, special training exercises, and informational seminars. The Safety Committee, comprised of representatives from several County departments, has been established to assist in these activities and to facilitate effective communication between employees and management about workplace safety and health issues.

Employees and supervisors receive periodic workplace safety training, coordinated by the Safety Officer. Certain training exercises, mandated by law, relate to potential safety and health hazards and safe work practices and procedures to eliminate or minimize hazards. Other training exercises, such as CPR instruction, are offered as a service available to employees on a voluntary basis. It is the policy of the County to accommodate voluntary safety training opportunities to the greatest extent possible within the demands of the working schedule of each department.

Each employee is expected to obey safety rules and to exercise caution in all work activities.

Employees should report unsafe working conditions to the supervisor. Employees who violate safety standards, who cause hazardous or dangerous situations, or who fail to report or, where appropriate, remedy such situations, may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. All inquiries or reports on safety issues can be made without fear of reprisal.

Some of the best safety improvement ideas come from employees. Those with ideas or suggestions for improved safety in the workplace are encouraged to raise them with their supervisor, or bring them to the attention of the Safety Officer.

In the case of accidents that result in injury, regardless of how insignificant the injury may appear, employees should immediately notify their supervisor. Such reports are necessary to comply with policies and regulations pertaining to insurance and worker's compensation benefits procedures.

WORK SCHEDULES

All County Offices and Facilities will be open to the public from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Some County Offices and Facilities may be open at other hours depending on the function or service provided. Public safety personnel, including the staffs of the Advance Life Support, Airport, Emergency Management Agency, the Sheriff's Office, and the Detention Center, are required to provide services on a continuous basis and shall work scheduled hours as recommended by their department heads and as approved by the County Manager. Employees at County recreational facilities and the Roads Department are required to work according to work schedules recommended by their department heads and as approved by the County Manager.

Department heads or supervisors are responsible for adequate staffing and work scheduling

during all hours that their respective offices or facilities are open. Supervisors shall advise employees of the times their schedules will normally begin and end and the time and duration of lunch periods. Staffing needs and operational demands, including emergency responses, may necessitate variations in starting and ending times, shift work, and variations in the total hours that may be scheduled during a work day or work week.

Flextime scheduling is available on a limited basis, to accommodate employees' personal or educational needs, if the working requirements and staffing needs during the department's business hours are adequately met. Flextime scheduling shall be at the discretion of the department head, subject to approval by the County Manager, and will be restricted to not more than two (2) hours variation from the normal business hours. Under no circumstances may flextime scheduling result in any employee working less than the work requirement.

LUNCH AND BREAK PERIODS

All full-time employees are provided with a lunch period of not more than sixty (60) minutes and not less than thirty (30) minutes in length for each regular workday or shift period. Supervisors will schedule lunch periods to accommodate operating requirements. Employees will be relieved of all active responsibilities and restrictions during lunch periods and will not be compensated for that time.

Each workday, employees will be provided with two (2) break periods, in addition to the lunch period. Breaks shall not exceed ten (10) minutes in length and shall be scheduled by supervisors to accommodate operating requirements. To the extent possible, rest periods will be provided in the middle of work periods. Since this time is counted and paid as time worked, employees must not be absent from their work or duty stations beyond the allotted break period.

ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY

To maintain a safe and productive work environment, the County expects employees to be reliable and punctual in reporting for scheduled work. Repeated absenteeism and tardiness place a burden on other employees and on the County. In instances when employees cannot avoid being late to work or are unable to work as scheduled, they should notify their supervisor as soon as possible in advance of the anticipated tardiness or absence.

Employees are responsible to monitor their benefit leave balances and use their leaves in accordance with stated policies. Leave and attendance records, documenting all scheduled and unscheduled leaves and absences and leave balances, shall be maintained in each department and submitted to Administrative Services each calendar quarter, following employee verification of the accuracy of the records. Employees should contact their supervisor or department head, or Administrative Services, for information pertaining to their leave and attendance records.

Poor attendance, excessive tardiness, and abuse of leave benefits are disruptive and may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

Dress, grooming, and personal cleanliness standards contribute to the morale of all employees and affect the business image the County presents to the public, clients, and visitors.

During business hours, employees are expected to present a clean, neat appearance and to dress according to the requirements of their positions and work environment. Articles of clothing must be neat, clean, in good taste, and not constitute a safety or health hazard. Employees who appear for work inappropriately dressed will be sent home by the department head and directed to return

to work in proper attire. Under such circumstances, employees will not be compensated for the time away from work.

Special attire or gear issued for weather protection or safety reasons shall be worn according to the policies of the department. Failure to comply could result in dismissal from a work activity with loss of pay.

SMOKING

State of Maryland regulations require that all employers ensure that there is no smoking in enclosed workplaces. The definition of "enclosed workplace" includes all indoor areas of all County facilities and vehicles (when a vehicle is occupied by more than one person). In keeping with the County's intent to provide a safe and healthful work environment for employees, smoking is prohibited in the County workplace in accordance with the State of Maryland regulations.

This policy applies equally to all employees, clients, and visitors.

USE OF COMMUNICATION AND MAIL SYSTEMS

Employees should practice discretion in using County telephones for personal business. Personal calls should be limited to urgent matters or emergencies requiring immediate attention. Employees shall advise their supervisor of necessary personal long distance or toll calls and are required to reimburse the County for charges.

Use of County FAX equipment and copying machines should be restricted to County business. However, employees may use these machines for personal use if approved by the supervisor and

must reimburse the County for the expense.

The County mail system is reserved for business purposes only, and County paid postage shall not be utilized for sending or receiving personal mail at the workplace. Employees who are found to have used the County system for personal use will be required to reimburse the expenses and will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Use of County owned fixed base and mobile radio communication equipment is limited to work related or administrative issues, including personal emergency contacts as necessary, and shall be as short and to the point as possible. Extraneous or casual conversation shall be avoided. Foul, hostile, or argumentative language will not be tolerated over radio air, and employees who violate this policy will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

COMPUTER AND E-MAIL USAGE

Computers, computer files, on-line or electronic mailing systems, software, or other automated systems furnished to employees are County property intended for business use only. Employees shall not use a password, access a file, or retrieve any stored communication without authorization. Employees shall not use County computer resources for personal gain or entertainment. Use of personally owned computer systems or equipment at the workplace is not permitted without specific authorization. To ensure compliance with this policy, computer systems usage may be monitored. Employees using or developing permanent database or document files, or other sensitive automated information, are responsible to ensure that proper security and backup systems are maintained to protect the files from inadvertent loss or unauthorized access or alteration.

The County strives to maintain a workplace free of harassment and sensitive to the diversity of its employees. Therefore, the County prohibits the use of computers and computer resources in ways that are disruptive, offensive to others, or harmful to morale. For example, the display or transmission of cartoons, sexually explicit images or messages is strictly prohibited. Other such misuse includes, but is not limited to, ethnic slurs, racial comments, off-color jokes, or anything that may be construed as harassment or showing disrespect for others. Employees who violate this policy will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Electronic mail may not be used for any matters unrelated to County business.

The County purchases and licenses the use of various computer software for business purposes and does not own the copyright to this software or its related documentation. Unless authorized by the software developer, the County does not have the right to reproduce such software in violation of copyright protection regulations. Employees may only use software on local area networks or on multiple stations according to the software license agreement. The County prohibits the illegal duplication of software and its related documentation.

Employees should advise their supervisor, or Administrative Services, of violations of this policy. Employees who violate this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

USE OF COUNTY EQUIPMENT AND VEHICLES

Equipment and vehicles essential in accomplishing job duties are expensive and may be difficult to replace. When using County owned property, employees are expected to exercise care, perform required maintenance, and follow all operating instructions, safety standards, and guidelines. Vehicles shall always be returned after a work assignment in a neat and reasonably

clean state, with all debris removed.

Please notify the supervisor if any equipment, machines, tools, or vehicles appear to be damaged, defective, or in need of repair. Prompt reporting of damages, defects, and the need for repairs could prevent deterioration of equipment and possible injury to employees or others. The supervisor can answer any questions about an employee's responsibility for maintenance and care of equipment or vehicles used on the job.

Vehicle operator checklists and mileage logs shall be completed as required by state or federal law, or County department policy. This shall apply to all County owned pool or assigned vehicles used by employees in the course of performance of duties.

Personal use of vehicles, or use of vehicles for any other reason than performance of duties or transport to and from work assignments, is prohibited unless specifically authorized by the department head, or the County Manager.

Employees shall be responsible to maintain a current operator's license of proper classification for the vehicle being used. The County may randomly require certification of the license status of any employee assigned to operate County vehicles to verify the proper license classification is valid. Operation of a County vehicle without a valid and properly classified operator's license shall be grounds for termination of employment.

Employees charged with parking, driving, or traffic violations while operating a County owned vehicle shall be responsible for their own disposition of the citation. Employees charged with the cause of an accident while operating a County owned vehicle shall be subject to a drug screening as specified under the County's Substance Abuse Program and may be required to pay for damages if gross negligence is determined. The improper, careless, negligent, destructive, or

unsafe or illegal use or operation of equipment or vehicles, as well as receipt of excessive or avoidable traffic and parking violations, is prohibited and can result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Employees and passengers must wear seat restraints at all times while operating or riding in County owned vehicles.

Use of County owned equipment, vehicles, and facilities for personal reasons, or personal gain and profit, either on or off County property, is prohibited and can result in disciplinary action, including termination of employment. Use of County vehicles by someone other than County employees is strictly prohibited.

PERSONAL PROPERTY

Personal property, not necessary or authorized during or for the performance of work assignments, is prohibited in the workplace. If such property is brought into the workplace, it should be secured by the employee in an assigned locker or designated area, though the County assumes no responsibility for its loss, theft, or damage. If the use of unnecessary or unauthorized personal property by an employee creates a hazard in the workplace, affects productivity, or is disruptive to other employees, the employee will be required to remove or secure the property, or be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

BUSINESS TRAVEL EXPENSES

The County will reimburse employees for reasonable business travel expenses incurred while on assignments away from the normal work location. All business travel must be approved in advance by the County Manager.

Employees whose travel plans have been approved should make all travel arrangements through

their department's administration, or Administrative Services.

When approved, the actual costs of travel, meals, lodging, and other expenses directly related to accomplishing business travel objectives will be reimbursed by the County. Employees are expected to limit expenses to reasonable amounts. Cash advances on expenses will not normally be available.

Employees who are involved in an accident while traveling on business must promptly report the incident to their immediate supervisor. Vehicles owned, leased, or rented by the County may not be used for personal or non-business reasons without prior approval.

With prior approval, employees on business travel may be accompanied by a family member or friend, when the presence of a companion will not interfere with successful completion of business objectives, and when additional expenses incurred are paid by the employee. Generally, employees are also permitted to combine personal travel with business travel, as long as time away from work is approved in accordance with the annual leave policy. Additional expenses arising from such non-business travel are the responsibility of the employee.

When travel is completed, employees should submit completed travel expense vouchers within seven (7) calendar days. Receipts for all individual expenses shall accompany travel vouchers. Employees should contact their supervisor for guidance and assistance on procedures related to travel arrangements, expense reports, reimbursement for specific expenses, or any other business travel issues.

Abuse of this business travel expenses policy, including falsifying expense reports to reflect costs not incurred by the employee, can be grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

VISITORS IN THE WORKPLACE

To provide for the safety and security of employees and the County facilities, only persons having business with County personnel are allowed in the workplace. Restricting unauthorized visitors helps maintain safety standards, protects against theft, ensures security of equipment, protects confidential information, safeguards employee welfare, and avoids potential distractions and disturbances. Accordingly, non-emergency or non-essential visits by friends and family members of employees is discouraged. Uninvited or unscheduled solicitation of products and services is prohibited.

All visitors should enter County facilities at a reception area, or be met by the employee with whom the visit is scheduled. Persons having business with County personnel will receive directions or be escorted to their destination. Employees are responsible for the conduct and safety of their visitors.

If an unauthorized individual is observed on County premises, employees should direct the individual to their point of destination, or, if necessary, notify their supervisor.

SOLICITATION

In an effort to assure a productive and harmonious work environment, persons not employed by the County may not solicit or distribute literature in the workplace at any time for any purpose.

The County recognizes that employees may have interests in events and organizations outside the workplace. However, employees may not solicit or distribute literature concerning these activities during working time or at the workplace.

In addition, the posting of written solicitations on County bulletin boards is prohibited. Bulletin boards are reserved for official communications regarding employment or public issues. All documents shall be approved by the department head prior to posting.

RECYCLING

The County supports environmental awareness by encouraging recycling and waste management in its business practices and operating procedures. This support includes a commitment to the purchase, use and disposal of products and materials in a manner that will best utilize natural resources and minimize any negative impact on the earth's environment.

CONDUCT AND RESOLUTION

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT

To ensure orderly operations and provide the best possible work environment, the County expects employees to follow standards of conduct that will protect the interests and safety of all employees and the organization.

It is not possible to list all the forms of behavior that are considered unacceptable in the workplace. The following is a non-inclusive listing of examples of infractions of rules of conduct and employment, or circumstances, that may result in a disciplinary or personnel action, up to and including termination of employment whether inside or outside of the workplace.

- Incompetence or gross inefficiency in the performance of duties.
- Insubordination, disrespectful conduct toward a supervisor, or failure or refusal to comply with the assignment of a supervisor.
- Untruthful statements, willful or negligent falsification of timesheets, reports, records, or other fraudulent behavior detrimental, or potentially detrimental, to the County, the public, or co-workers.
- Excessive lateness or absenteeism, absence from workplace or duty station without notice, or abuse of leave benefits.
- Excessive attention to personal business or affairs while on duty as a County employee.
- Engagement in any private endeavor in conflict with County business, ethical policy, or operations.
- Acceptance of any service, benefit, or item of value, such as a loan or discount not available to the general public, received directly or indirectly from any person, firm, or corporation, for the implied or perceived expectation of favorable influence or preferential treatment from the employee.
- Inappropriate, unlawful, or unauthorized solicitation or influence for political or ideological purposes or personal gain, including ticket sales, posting of advertisements, circulation of petitions, donation requests, while on duty or engaged in County business.
- Unauthorized, personal, or illegal use of telephones, the mail system, communications systems and equipment, and computer systems and equipment.
- Theft, or inappropriate use, removal, or possession of County property.

- Negligent or willful damage or waste of County or client-owned property, vehicles, equipment, material, or supplies.
- Unauthorized use of County property, equipment, materials, supplies, vehicles, or resources for personal gain.
- Unauthorized transfer of official identification or other County property.
- Willful slander or malicious mischaracterization of co-workers, superiors, clients, associates, elected County officials, or public citizens.
- Racial, sexual, or other unlawful or unwelcome harassment, or failure to act to stop such conduct in the workplace.
- Offensive treatment of clients, the public, or co-workers.
- General misconduct or boisterous or disruptive activity, such as gambling, fighting, use of abusive or obscene language, threatening violence, or creating a nuisance or disturbance, while on duty, at the workplace, or engaged in County business.
- Use, possession, distribution, sale, or transfer of, or impairment by, alcohol or controlled or illegal substances while on duty, at a County workplace, engaged in County business, or operating County owned vehicles or equipment.
- Possession of unauthorized or deadly weapons, firearms, or explosives while on duty or engaged in County business.
- Willful or negligent violation of safety or health rules.
- Smoking in prohibited areas.
- Inappropriate official or personal conduct degrading to County classified service or general misconduct undermining the trust in public service.
- Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information.
- Willful, negligent, or criminal violation of County personnel policies or federal, state, or local laws, regulations, ordinances, statutes, or policies in effect.

Each employee is reminded that she or he represents all County employees in both personal and professional conduct. Employees should review the policies of this handbook or contact Administrative Services for further information or clarification regarding rules of conduct and unacceptable or inappropriate behavior at the workplace.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The County recognizes the problem of substance abuse in our society. Not only does a drug or alcohol-impaired employee jeopardize his or her own health and well-being, but also that of others. In order to achieve and maintain a drug-free workplace, the County will not accept abuse of drugs or alcohol by any employee. An employee reporting to work under the influence of drugs or alcohol will be considered unfit to perform his or her duties and will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination of employment. Being under the influence, using, possessing or selling controlled dangerous substances, including alcohol, on County property, in County vehicles, or at any time when performing services for the County, is strictly prohibited. Being under the influence of or using alcohol at any time during the four (4) hours prior to going on duty also is strictly prohibited.

The County has established procedures which requires all employees to submit to a breath screening analysis to detect the presence of alcohol and/or a urine screening analysis to detect the presence of controlled substances under certain circumstances. Employees using over-the-counter or physician prescribed medications must notify their supervisor if there is a likelihood that such medication could affect job performance or safety.

All employees will be required to undergo a drug and/or alcohol screening in the instances set for below:

- 1) As part of the pre-employment hiring process once a conditional offer of employment has been made;
- 2) As part of a transfer to a position which requires driving a County vehicle;
- 3) When there exists reasonable cause to believe that an employee may be under the influence of alcohol or controlled substances while on duty;
- 4) Post-Accident;

- 5) Random;
- 6) Return to Duty (if an employee is to be considered for return to duty after testing positive for alcohol or controlled substances); and
- 7) Unannounced Follow-up Testing (under the direction of a substance abuse professional after a positive test.)

An employee who tests positive for alcohol (breath alcohol greater than 0.02) or controlled substances will be immediately removed from all safety sensitive functions and will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination of employment. The County will make a reasonable effort to encourage rehabilitation and avoid dismissal when it learns of substance abuse provided that the employee: (1) makes a serious attempt to undertake rehabilitation; (2) agrees to comply with the County's policy in the future; (3) consents to follow-up testing at the employee's expense as determined by a substance abuse professional; and (4) successfully completes a recommended rehabilitation program.

A complete copy of the County's alcohol and drug abuse policy is available from Administrative Services.

UNLAWFUL HARASSMENT

The County is committed to providing a work environment that is free of discrimination, hostility, and unlawful harassment. Actions, words, jokes, innuendoes, or comments, based on an individual's sex, race, ethnicity, age, disability, religion, or any other legally protected characteristic will not be tolerated. As an example, harassment, both overt and subtle, in any form of employee misconduct that is demeaning to another person, undermines the integrity of the employment relationship, impedes or interferes with anyone's right to equal employment opportunity, or creates a hostile atmosphere in the workplace, is strictly prohibited.

Any employee who wishes to report an incident of sexual, racial, or other unlawful harassment should promptly relate the matter to his or her supervisor or department head. If the supervisor or department head is unavailable, non-responsive, or is involved in the complaint, or the employee believes it would be inappropriate to contact that person, the employee should immediately contact the Assistant County Manager, or if necessary, the County Manager. Any employee can raise concerns, submit complaints, or file reports of harassment, without fear of reprisal, unless such allegations are grossly unsubstantiated or willfully false, in which case the complainant will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

Any department head, supervisor, or manager who becomes aware of possible sexual, racial, or other unlawful harassment shall promptly advise the County Manager or Administrative Services. Failure to act to mitigate a condition of unlawful harassment could constitute complicity in the harassment, and subject the department head, supervisor or manager to appropriate disciplinary action.

All complaints and allegations of sexual, racial, or other unlawful harassment will be promptly and thoroughly investigated by the person receiving the complaint, or as otherwise directed by the County Manager. All documentation of the investigation of a complaint of harassment shall be confidential and shall be retained with personnel records in Administrative Services. The County Manager shall inform all parties, involved in a complaint and investigation of unlawful harassment, of the outcome of the investigation.

Anyone engaging in sexual, racial, or other unlawful harassment, or found to be in violation of this policy, shall be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE

The purpose of this policy is to state the County's position on administering equitable and consistent discipline for unsatisfactory conduct in the workplace.

The County's own best interest lies in ensuring fair treatment of all employees and in making certain that disciplinary actions are prompt, uniform, and impartial. The major purpose of any disciplinary action is to correct the problem, prevent recurrence, and prepare the employee for satisfactory service in the future.

Although employment with the County is based on mutual consent and both the employee and the County have the right to terminate employment "at will", with or without cause or advance notice, the County may use progressive discipline at its discretion.

Progressive discipline means that, with respect to most disciplinary problems, the following four steps will normally be followed in sequence for each offense. If more than 12 months have passed since the last disciplinary action, the process will normally start over again.

There may be serious circumstances, such as violation of law, violation of safety procedures, endangerment of other employees or the public, or gross violation of County policies, when one or more steps are bypassed, or in extreme situations, when termination of employment is necessary without going through any of the progressive discipline steps.

1. Employee Counseling - Without Formal Documentation

This disciplinary measure is in effect, a counseling session and most frequently used for a minor infraction or at the beginning of a performance problem. It is an informal type of discipline which requires no formal record of the action.

2. Oral Reprimand - With Documentation

If a performance problem persists or there are repeated or more serious occurrences of misconduct, the supervisor will document the problem. The employee will be informed that further disciplinary action will result, if the problem continues. A letter will be provided by the supervisor detailing the problem and read to or by the employee, who will be requested to sign the letter (signature is not mandatory). The employee will be advised that the letter will be entered in his or her personnel file.

3. Written Reprimand - Disciplinary Layoff

In situations where unsatisfactory conduct or performance persists or when the incident is serious, the employee will be placed on disciplinary layoff without pay for a period from one (1) to several days, depending on the seriousness of the problem or the number of recurrences. This form of discipline is designed to give the employee a chance to correct the problem. The employee will be informed that if the problem continues, further disciplinary action will be initiated up to and including termination of employment. A letter will be provided by the supervisor and read to or by the employee, who will be requested to sign the letter (signature is not mandatory). The employee will be advised that this letter will be entered in his or her personnel file.

4. Termination of Employment

There will be occasions when separation from the County may be necessary in the event of continued disciplinary problems, after appropriate warning(s), or when an extremely serious violation of the County's rules, policies or procedures occurs.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

The County is committed to providing the best possible working conditions for its employees. Part of this commitment is encouraging an open and frank atmosphere in which any problem, complaint, suggestion, or question receives a timely response from supervisory personnel and management.

It is the responsibility of every supervisor and department head to be alert to employee problems and complaints and to attempt to resolve these as quickly as possible. It is the employee's responsibility to bring any problems to the supervisor's attention. Since it is not always possible to resolve grievances through direct discussion between employee and supervisor, the procedures described below provide a clearly defined method to be used when such an impasse arises.

DEFINITION: A grievance is defined as a cause of complaint by an employee over the interpretation or application of a policy, procedure, rule or regulation adopted by the County, or if an employee feels they are being unfairly treated.

Step 1. If an employee has a grievance, then the employee should schedule a meeting with the employee's immediate supervisor within five (5) working days of the cause of the complaint. If the grievance is not resolved within three (3) working days after the meeting, the employee may proceed to the next step.

Step 2. The grievance shall be presented in writing to the department head (or the Assistant County Manager if the complaint is against the department head) within five (5) working days after the meeting with the supervisor. The department head shall schedule a meeting with the employee within five (5) working days after the receipt of the written grievance. The department head may request the supervisor to be present at this meeting. The department head shall, within

five (5) working days after the conclusion of the meeting, render his or her decision in writing to the employee. In the event the employee is not satisfied with the decision of the department head, he or she may proceed to the next step.

Step 3. Within five (5) working days after receipt of the written decision of the department head, the employee may appeal in writing to the Assistant County Manager. The Assistant County Manager shall schedule a meeting with the employee within five (5) working days after the receipt of the written grievance. The Assistant County Manager may request the supervisor and/or the department head to be present at the meeting. The Assistant County Manager shall, within five (5) working days after the conclusion of the meeting, render in writing a recommendation or a solution to the grievance. If the employee is not satisfied with the decision of the Assistant County Manager, he or she may proceed to the next step.

Step 4. The County Manager shall schedule a conference with the employee within five (5) working days after receipt of a written appeal from the employee. The County Manager may request the supervisor, department head and/or the Assistant County Manager be present at the meeting. The County Manager shall, within five (5) working days after the conclusion of the meeting, render a decision in writing to all involved parties. If the employee is not satisfied with the decision of the County Manager, he or she may proceed to the next step.

Step 5. The employee may request an appointment with the County Council to appeal the decision of the County Manager within five (5) working days after receipt of the written decision of the County Manager. The request shall be in writing and addressed to the County Manager. The County Manager shall schedule a conference with the County Council within fifteen (15) working days after receipt of the written grievance. The Council will review the grievance and may request any of the involved parties to meet to discuss the complaint. The Council shall render a decision within fifteen (15) working days after the conclusion of the meeting. The

decision of the County Council shall be final and binding on all parties.

FAILURE TO RESPOND OR APPEAL: Failure of management to respond to a grievance submitted by an employee, within the time limits set forth in the grievance procedures steps, shall automatically initiate the process at the next step. Failure of an employee to submit an appeal within the designated time limits for each step shall require the submittal of a written explanation for the delay to be submitted with the appeal. By mutual agreement, both parties may waive the time limits in the grievance procedure.

RECORDS: A written record of the review and disposition of the grievance at each step of the review process shall be prepared by the supervisor or individual responsible for administering the grievance at that step. Administrative Services will maintain the official files on all grievances, which shall be retained for two (2) years.

Not every problem can be resolved to everyone's total satisfaction. However, only through the understanding and discussion of mutual problems can employees and management develop confidence in each other. This confidence is important to the operation of an efficient and harmonious work environment, and helps to ensure everyone's job security, which is the benefit of an effective grievance procedure.

SEPARATION

It is the County's intention that service separations occur as fairly and efficiently as possible, with appropriate advance written notice, and in the best interests of all parties concerned. The process of separation shall include payment of all wages due to the employee, less any applicable deductions, and resolution of all due benefits, through the date of separation. The following categories of service separation and procedure are applicable to all regular full-time employment classifications, or other employment classifications as specifically indicated:

RESIGNATION

Resignation is a voluntary act of service separation initiated by the employee to terminate employment with the County. The County requires at least ten (10) working days written resignation notice from a resigning employee, and may deduct one (1) day of available vacation/annual leave for each day less than the required notice given.

Employees who resign shall receive payment for all vacation/annual leave credit in accordance with the leave policy, except as provided above.

Prior to an employee's departure, an exit interview shall be scheduled to discuss the reasons for resignation and the effect of the resignation on benefits. A record of the interview and documentation of any failure of the employee to comply with the resignation procedures shall be noted in the employee's employment file.

RETIREMENT

Retirement is a special condition of resignation, for which the resignation procedures apply, and

additional considerations are addressed according to the retirement benefits policies. The exit interview for retirement is very important to ensure that all retirement benefits are correctly coordinated. Retiring employees are urged to review all retirement benefits with Administrative Services and the Maryland State Retirement Agency well in advance of the date of separation from active employment.

LAYOFF

If insufficient work or a lack of funding requires a reduction in the number of employees in a County department, layoffs will be made by approval of the County Council, subject to the following conditions:

Probationary employees, other than department heads, will be laid off before regular, full-time employees, regardless of time in service.

Part-time and temporary employees will be laid off before full-time employees.

Layoffs will be determined by length of service within the same grade and department, assuming that the relative skills of employees within the grade are comparable. The County reserves the right to layoff a more senior worker if a worker with less seniority has significantly greater skill or ability, as documented by performance evaluations.

A minimum of two (2) weeks notice will be provided to an individual being laid off.

Employees who are laid off will be given priority consideration when County vacancies for which they are qualified are being filled.

If an employee is laid off and becomes re-employed by the County within five (5) years of the layoff date of separation, the employee's sick leave balance will be reinstated. In addition, the employee's seniority will be retained as it applies to the accumulation of vacation/annual leave benefits and salary policies.

SUSPENSION

An employee may be suspended without pay for disciplinary reasons for such length of time as recommended by the department head and approved by the County Manager, though the period of unpaid suspension shall not exceed seven (7) working days.

The request for a personnel action of suspension shall be submitted to the County Manager by the department head in writing, including complete documentation and dates of incidents/occurrences, supporting suspension.

Health, dental, life insurance, and retirement benefits shall continue to be in effect as applicable for an employee who is suspended. During a period of suspension the employee shall not be permitted access to the workplace.

If an employee is subject to disciplinary action within twelve (12) months following a period of suspension, the County may immediately dismiss the employee without further action.

TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT

As the County and the employee maintain an "at will" employment agreement, any employee in the County service may be separated permanently from employment for just cause as determined by the County.

TERMINATION OF POSITION

The County reserves the right to terminate or abolish any position for discretionary reasons related to funding and operational needs. The procedure for separation under a termination action shall be the same as for other categories of separation, except that a grievance appeal by the employee will not be available. Benefits shall be resolved in a termination action according to the classification of employment.

RETURN OF COUNTY PROPERTY

Employees are responsible for items issued to them by the County or in their possession or control while employed, such as keys, identification badges, manuals, written materials, pagers, electronic devices, protective equipment, uniforms, special tools or equipment, vehicles, or other items specifically needed in the performance of duties.

In the event of separation from employment, all County property must be returned by the employee on or before their last day of work. The County may withhold from the employee's final paycheck the cost of any items that are not returned as required. The County may also take all action deemed appropriate to recover or protect its property.

REINSTATEMENT

In the event that an employee is reinstated to an original position, or rehired into a new position of County service, following a separation from County service, accrued benefits which are not resolved or compensated for at the date of separation, may be available for reinstatement as determined by the County Manager.

Questions regarding any County Policies should be addressed to Administrative Services.

AMENDMENT AND TERMINATION

The County reserves the right to terminate any or all of these policy guidelines or to modify, amend or change the provisions, terms and conditions for these guidelines at any time without prior notice.